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ABSTRACT

The Creating Prairie Cronies, Older Women's Network project was designed and implemented to research and address the specific needs of older women living in rural Saskatchewan. Project objectives included the following: promoting networking among and providing support for existing groups working to meet the health, education, and community development needs of older women in Saskatchewan; supporting partners and their existing networks; making use of existing health promotion and educational resources and developing new ones; and ensuring the input and involvement of older adults throughout all stages of the project. During the project, a total of 764 women participated in 28 educational workshops and regional gatherings designed to strengthen community networks that contribute to the well-being of older women. Other project activities included the development of life-cycle learning publications on the following topics: giving and taking care, older women and poverty, widowhood, and wise use of medication. Videos on older women and poverty and the celebrations and challenges of growing older as a woman in society were also developed. Although funding for the project has ceased, the network developed during the project remains very active. (MN)

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Seniors' Education Centre

FINAL REPORT ON

CREATING PRAIRIE CRONIES,

OLDER WOMEN'S NETWORK PROJECT

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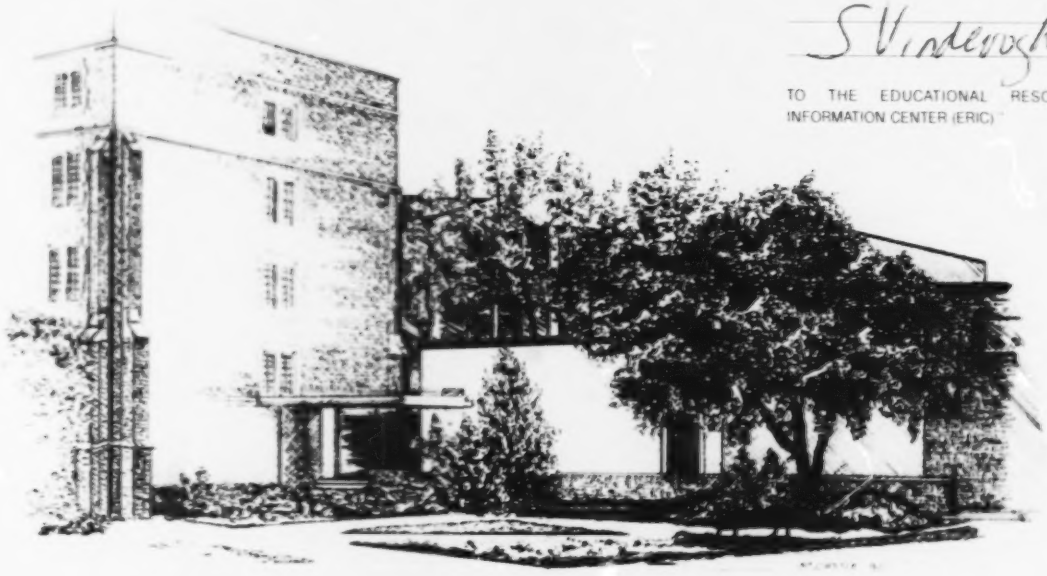

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FINAL REPORT ON

CREATING PRAIRIE CRONIES,

OLDER WOMEN'S NETWORK PROJECT

The Seniors' Education Centre
University Extension
University of Regina

Funded by Health Promotions
Directorate
Health and Welfare Canada

Project Co-ordinator
Ruth Blaser
March 1991 - March 1993

Acknowledgments

..."and why should it not be put to use - the always extraordinary material of every day life that piles up - full with trash and treasures; with its power, when it is sifted and scrutinized, to enlighten and heal?"[1]

The coordinator of this project acknowledges with joy, gratitude and respect all the older prairie women who have participated and continue to participate in Creating Prairie Cronies, the Older Women's Network. The always extraordinary material of your every day lives continues to enlighten and heal.

The Project Working Group (PWG) provided both vision and "rudder" throughout the project. This group of women "birthed" and nurtured the vision of what a network of and for older woman could be. It was the decision of the PWG to use feminist process and principles in directing and implementing this project. More will be said about this in the section on the Project Working Group.

The Project Working Group's members are as follows:

Trudy Colpitts, Oxbow

Rosella Diduck, Kamsack

Beth Hone, Lumsden

Heather MacDougall, Cabri

Lilja Stefansson, Regina

Amanda Wilmot, Garrick

Mildred Wotherspoon, Melville

Special thanks to the women who took the risk and shared their life stories and learnings in the Life Cycle Learning publications and the videos. Without exception each of these women wanted to share there stories and learnings in the hopes that other women would be helped. These women are:

Lorraine Waldo, Moose Jaw

Elvira Casteneda, Regina.

Lilja Stefansson, Regina

Anne Hunter, Saskatoon rural

Chris Blondeau Perry, Griffin

Marion Tolley, Moose Jaw

Joyce Deutscher, Regina

Annie Ruttle, Regina

Trudy Colpitts, Oxbow

Mildred Wotherspoon, Melville

Evelyn Sedgewick (Sp. check), Govan

Alice Perry, Regina

Rosemary Torjusen, Regina

Donette Elder, Filmore

Jean Goodwill, Standing Buffalo Reserve

Dr. John Oussoren, Director of the Seniors Education Centre, provided thoughtful and careful supervision and colleagueship throughout the project.

The original project proposal was designed by Darla Goettler and Linda Van Sickle with the supervision of John Oussoren. My colleagues at the Seniors' Education Centre, Stan Vindevogel, Diane Mullan, Heather Cosman, Jill Krazilowez and then Mitzi Krazilowez have been helpful, supportive and just plain fun to work with.

I would also like to acknowledge with appreciation Larry Flynn and Cate Harrington, Health and Welfare Canada, Program Officers for their sensitive, helpful and skillful supervision and colleagueship, and funding.

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Background

Creating Prairie Cronies, Older Women's Network project, was built on the foundations established in two important projects which preceded it, *Discover Choices* and *Sowing Circles of Hope , Support Groups For Older Farm Women.*

Discover Choices was an extensive initiative directed at seniors' health promotion and community development needs and activities. This health promotions program was initiated by Health and Welfare Canada and was designed to enable older adults to make informed choices about health issues and thus enhance their independence and quality of life. The program operated in Manitoba and Saskatchewan from 1988 to 1990 and used a community development framework to build on existing programs and activities for seniors and their organizations.

Saskatchewan older adults received significant support and encouragement in their health promotion and community development activities from the Discover Choices project.

Sowing Circles of Hope (insert from final report)

An important learning clearly emerged from these two projects. There were large numbers of isolated, low income, primarily rural older women whose unique health, learning and community needs and concerns had not been addressed in a significant way.

Aging is a women's issue in terms of demographics.[2] It is also becoming clearer that the issues which women and men face as they age are very different. Therefore gender specific programming design is increasingly important.

Life expectancy is increasing for both women and men; however women continue to live longer then men. In Canada in 1986, the ratio of women to men at age 65 was 1,000 to 850, and at age 85 was 1,000 to 450. Female seniors are far more likely to live alone - 60% in comparison to 23% of male seniors. Gee and Kimball state that females are more likely to live in poverty.[3]

For example: according to the National Council on Welfare 1989 Report 61% of all older Canadian women (55 plus) who are unattached to male partners live in poverty.[4] Two out of three Canadian women will be in a position of being primary care-givers for their elderly husbands or parents, often with minimal community support. Any of these circumstances may result in loneliness and isolation, limited access to health care, transportation and other support services needed to maintain independent and healthy lifestyles.

In her book *Small Expectations: Society's Betrayal of Older Women*, Leah Cohen writes this: " Aging women are still the invisible majority of elderly in Canada, despite their increasing numbers. Until the 1970s, older women have gone virtually unrecognized in academic literature in gerontology, sociology, and women's studies. Research on gender differences have ignored the reality of older women's lives, ignoring in turn how sexism and the social construction of old age has contributed to older women's low morale, diminished self-esteem and lack of confidence."[5].

Creating Prairie Cronies was designed and implemented to research and address the specific needs of older women living in rural Saskatchewan.

Getting Started

Addressing the unique health, learning and community development needs of isolated older women in Saskatchewan was the primary focus of the project. The particular group to be focused on in this project were to be older women who live in rural areas and who are vulnerable to isolation and/or who have a low income.

Project objectives included:

1. To promote networking among and provide support for existing groups which are working to address the health, education and community development needs of older women in Saskatchewan.

2. To support partners and their existing networks.

3. To make use of existing health promotion and educational resources and develop new ones.

4. To ensure the input and involvement of older adults throughout all stages of the project.

5. To develop an ongoing process of evaluation.

One of the initial challenges in the project was to make connections with women in the communities.

An important first step in building a solid base for the project, by gaining access to and credibility with isolated women, was to recruit and build the project working group team. This group's knowledge of, access to and credibility with older women in their communities and districts was critical.

In many ways the guiding principles for working with communities evolved during the first year of the project. The intention was to work in ways that were respectful and empowering of existing community groups which were already addressing the health promotion, community development and education needs of older Saskatchewan women.

Our intention was to work in ways that empowered and respected local community groups which were already working with older women.

The project's way of working with communities was rooted in these principles:

a) The Project Working Group would not enter a community before receiving an invitation, formal or informal. These invitations were as a response to an initial promotional campaign, in which we developed a project profile throughout the province.

b) a second principle was that work in communities would be based on the needs and or challenges that the particular group identified in an initial meeting.

c) a third principle in doing the work was that the project coordinator, together with someone from the CPC project working group, would provide group facilitation and related learning and education resources and processes for community workshops.

d) a fourth principle was that the experience and information that participants had, would serve as a primary resource for learning and addressing the issues at hand.

e) the final principle in doing the work is that evaluation be a component of all workshops and meetings.

Finding our ways into a variety of communities was facilitated by the credibility that PWG members already had, the guiding principles for working with communities and the credibility that was offered by virtue of this project being associated with the Seniors' Education Centre, University Extension, University of Regina.

Project Working Group

This poem by Ingrid Peti gives a glimpse into what became of the spirit of the Project Working Group of Creating Prairie Cronies.

At Sixty One

Like a panther
age crept up on me

but I refuse
to conform to its stereotypes

instead I will plunge forward
in my endeavors

nourish and stretch my mind
with new concepts,

thoughts, ideas

share knowledge
with my students,
neighbors, friends

The panther gives me
strength. [6]

Left to Right: Trudy Colpitts; Oxbow, Mildred Wotherspoon; Melville, Ruth Blaser; Project Coordinator, Heather MacDougall; Cabri, Amanda Wilmot; Garrick, Rosella Diduck; Kamsack, Lilja Stefansson; Regina, Beth Hone; Lumsden.

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In the early stages of the project, significant time was spent recruiting Project Working Group members. These women were recruited as a result of numerous conversations with older women and related seniors' organizations throughout the province, and according to the following criteria:

1. The Project Working Group was to include older women as well as representatives from partner groups identified in the Discover Choices Program. The majority of the PWG was to be older women with a variety of perspectives, experiences, opinions, and lifestyles representative of older women's lives on the prairies.

2. In recruiting the PWG the following were noted as helpful skills and abilities:

   - knowledge of the needs of older women in one's community as well as the services and resources available and not available to meet the needs of and enhance independence for older women.

   - ability to name the barriers to older women's independence and well being.

   - availability to actively participate in the Project Working Group, including the planning, implementation and evaluation of the project.

3. The PWG was to have geographical representation with the majority of members being from rural areas, particularly the north-eastern grain belt region which has the highest per capita older adult population in the province.

4. At least one member from the Seniors' University Group, which sponsored the project.

The PWG women brought a variety of experience and perspectives to the project and came from a cross section of rural communities. Each of the women were well aware of the challenges and needs that older women face. They were also aware of the resources that are and are not available to help address various needs.

The women on the PWG kept the project grounded in the realities of older women's lives. The Project Working Group grew to a point at which the members provided significant and ongoing leadership in all aspects of the project.

The PWG met on a regular basis to plan, implement and evaluate the project. They decided early in the project that it was important to make efforts to reclaim the word "Crone" because its original meaning was that of a respected older woman whose life experience was honored and valued. Thus the project's name became Creating Prairie Cronies, Older Women's Network.

The PWG chose to include feminist process in the working norms by which the project was to be developed. These norms were as follows:

- working with a flexible schedule with time for checking in and building community with one another.
- recognizing different personalities and the brilliance of differences.
- recognizing the common threads amongst us.
- developing trust in each other.
- sharing frustrations and concerns, growing together to reach the goal, one step at a time.
- communication, sharing of ideas and feelings.
- lots of explanations and sharing of what we meant.
- heart, tears, music, questions, hearing each other.
- everyone taking ownership for the work.
- diversity, differences of abilities and perceptions respected.
- finding ways to be together and to build community.
- circle has an opening for the wind/spirit and for people to come and go as they need to.
- learning and participating in the brilliance of the group rather than individual brilliance, while at the same time claiming our individual places and uniqueness.
- claiming nurturing as real and important work of the world.
- laughter, poetry and beauty cultivated all along the way.
- non-hierarchical ways of working
- circle formation for all meetings.

- confidentiality.

The PWG's way of working provided a model for community groups. They decided that if we were going to work together effectively, we also needed to pay attention to self care and building a community amongst ourselves. This group decided that CONFIDENTIALITY was essential if women were to learn and share together in significant and meaningful ways. The PWG did considerable reflection on the important of confidentiality and the importance of naming confidentiality as a norm in all community workshops.

This group of women became very aware of the similarities and differences amongst us and worked to appreciate and respect our individual and collective diversity. This group learned a great deal from and with one another and the many "prairie cronies" with whom we worked, learned and laughed.

The following is a listing of the PWG meeting dates and goals for each meeting. All PWG meetings were two days in length and were held in a residential setting.

1. August 12-14, 1991

   Meeting goals:

   a. To begin the ongoing process of getting to know one another and building the group.

   b. To share information about the project and its background.

   c. To do some planning for this project in the following areas:

      i. getting started in communities.

      ii. starting a newsletter, mailing list, name, logo, and discussing ideas, questions.

      iii. planning for a media campaign to spread the project profile throughout the province.

      iv. beginning the conversation about what would happen after two years when the funding is completed.

      v. discussing the kinds of evaluation processes we will use.

      vi. planning for a Summer '92 conference or gathering.

      vii. begin planning for a 93 conference or gathering.

2. September 25 and 26, 1991

   Meeting goals:

   a. To take time to check in with one another and welcome Rosella who could not be with us at the first meetings.

   b. To follow up and talk with one another about what we've been able to do in our communities to promote the project.

   c. Further planning for working in communities.

   d. Planning for the newsletter and the brochures.

3. January 29 and 30, 1992

   Meeting Goals:

   a. To catch up with each other on our activities, involvements, thoughts and learning related to Creating Prairie Cronies.

   b. To do on going project planning in the following areas:

      i. working in communities.

      ii. planning for the Life Cycle Learning publications. (These took the place of the newsletter.)

      iii. Creating Prairie Cronies conferences or gatherings.

   c. To do some more work on developing principles of confidentiality for Creating Prairie Cronies community workshops.

   d. To continue to familiarize ourselves with new resources related to the issues facing older women.

4. May 3 and 4, 1992

   Meeting goals:

   a. To share with one another about what we had experienced and learned since our last meeting.

   b. To review and evaluate the activities and processes of Creating Prairie Cronies in the past year.

      i. What we have done and how this is or is not consistent with the goals of the project.

      ii. How we have worked and how this is or is not consistent with the norms for working together.

      iii. What effect the work has had on older women.

      iv. What effect the work has had on the PWG and the coordinator.

   c. To do further project planning in the following areas:

      i. Prairie Cronies Summer Gathering.

      ii. Workshops in communities.

5. September 29 and 30, 1992

   Meeting Goals:

   a. To provide an opportunity for the Project Working Group to reconnect with one another, reflect on the work of the project, consolidate learnings regarding working with older women in rural Saskatchewan and to plan for future work.

   b. To provide an opportunity for the PWG to gather with women from a variety of communities who have been involved in the project to do further evaluation and planning for the Older Women's Network in rural Saskatchewan.

6. January 5 and 6, 1993

Meeting Goals:

a. To reconnect with one another.

b. To share information and plans that are currently in place for the final phase of the project:

- The Older Women Living in Hope workshop.
- Life Cycle Learning Publication "Older Women and the Wise use of Medication."
- Video update.
- Gathering the Grandmothers
- Caring for Caregivers proposal

c. To reflect on and evaluate the CPC Project.

- what we have learned
- reflection on how decisions were made and how information and power was shared.
- reflections on the effect that CPC has had on older women.

d. To plan further project closure.

- what, if anything, do we need to say and do with the older women's network by way of closure?
- what do we need to do with communicating project closure via the media?
- what input should go into the final project report?

Project Promotion

Broadly-based promotion of the project, and education on issues that older women face were the dual foci of all promotional work. As was noted in the Getting Started section, one of the guiding principles was that working in communities was begun on the basis of being invited by the community, formally or informally. However, we also knew that if this principle was to be effective, people needed to know about the project. On going promotional and educational work was initiated through various provincial media together with efforts to connect with and talk to community and partner groups.

A general media campaign which took place in October '91, This "introduction to the project" was distributed at the May 91 provincial Learning Unlimited Conference, through the Saskatchewan Seniors' Mechanism mailing to approximately 400 seniors' organizations in the province and through the quarterly mailing of the Rural Inter-Church Committee on Development Education to approximately 480 individuals and development education organizations in rural Saskatchewan (Attachment 1).

The Creating Prairie Cronies project brochure was developed and designed in the second quarter of the project and distributed via the Seniors' Mechanism mailing, the provincial library system, Community Clinic newsletters, and all project workshops, to specific seniors' organizations and related agencies. During this time the project did a general media campaign that introduced the project with a news release and the brochure through the Seniors' related press and all Saskatchewan weekly and daily newspapers. (Attachment 2).

In the third quarter of the project a specific media campaign was launched in conjunction, with the release of the video Older Women and Poverty.

Additional media campaigns were launched in the promotion of the Prairie Cronies Summer Gathering (July '92) and the regional workshop, Older Women Living in Hope (February '93).

A final specific media campaign focused on these things: CPC resources, project closure and announcing that a group of volunteers from the network are seeking funding from New Horizons to stabilize and expand the network. This closure mailing also listed the print and audio visual resources produced during the project and their availability through the Seniors' Education Centre.

Working in Communities

Participants in the project/conference/workshop made these comments:

"I'm not so frightened about growing older when I am with healthy, thoughtful, older people."

"Being a crone is special and different. A crone is a friend, a crone used to have an honourable place and it still should be so. We're trying to encourage people to think of cronies as special friends, women who are in the third phase of life, after the change, when we come into our own power."

Following a workshop on the *Wise Use of Medication* one woman shared that she had not been feeling well for months and as a result of the workshop had the courage to talk with her doctor about the heart medication that she had been prescribed which she believed was making her more ill. After considerable time and on going health issues, she finally did get her medication changed. This was very helpful to her health and well being.

Building a network of older women in rural Saskatchewan was the primary task at hand in the Creating Prairie Cronies project. Educational workshops in various communities significantly helped women to connect with one another and learn from and with one another.

The following is a listing of Creating Prairie Cronie Workshops which took place during the two-year project.

Location	Date	Participants
	1991	
1. Halbright (Introduction of the Project/Naming the Needs)	October 03	30
2. Balcarres (Being a Primary Caregiver)	October 17	11
	1992	
3. Balcarres (Gifts and Challenges of Growing Older)	January 28	13
4. Lemberg (Introduction to the project/Naming the needs)	January 09	12
5. Lemberg (Gifts and Challenges of Growing Older)	February 05	22
6. Regina (a one-day workshop on Older Women and Poverty)	February 29	42
7. Saskatoon (Consultation on Women and Aging)	March 04	27
8 Moose Jaw (Problem-Solving Workshop)	March 05	12
9 Lemberg (Being a Primary Caregiver)	March 19	18
10. Kamsack (Introduction to the project/Naming the needs)	March 17	15
11. Kamsack (Introduction to the project/Naming the needs at the seniors' housing complex)	March 17	11
12. Invermay (Intro to the project/Naming the Needs)	March 16	12
13. Weyburn (Intro to the project/Naming the Needs)	March 30	31

14. Regina — January 08-March 09 — 14
(an eight week class on issues that face older women)

15. Weyburn — April 21 — 27
(The Gifts and Challenges of Growing Older)

16. Weyburn — May 25 — 32
(Widowhood, an end and a new beginning)

17. Invermay — May 11 — 6
(The Wise Use of Medication)

18. Watrous — June 8 — 136
(Saskatchewan Women's Institute, promotion for the Prairie Cronies Summer Gathering)

19. Nipawin — June 16 — 22
(Being a Primary Caregiver)

20. Whitefox — June 16 — 11
(Being a Primary Caregiver)

21. Regina — July 14 and 15 — 82
(Prairie Cronies Summer Gathering)

22. Semans — October 08-December 3 — 11
(a seven-week class, Ourselves Growing Older, and related mental and physical health concerns)

23. Qu'Appelle — October 18 — 26
(conversations about Ourselves Growing Older)

Community workshops and/or regional gatherings were held primarily in the north-eastern grain belt area of the province. This area has the highest per capita senior population in the province.

24. Fort Qu'Appelle — November 12 — 35
(Living with Chronic Illness and/or Disability)

25. Lemberg — November 16 — 16
(The Wise Use of Medication)

26. Regina — December 06 — 42
(Celebrating the lives of older women)

1993

27. Lemberg — January 13 — 12
(Living with Grief and Loss)

28. Fort Qu'Appelle — February 1,2,3 — 36
(Older Women Living in Hope regional workshop)

A total of 764 women participated in the educational workshops and regional gatherings during the project. Invitations to do educational workshops came primarily from communities in the north-eastern grain belt area of the province. Lemberg-Weyburn requested a series of workshops, while the Seniors' Education Centre in Regina and the Last Mountain Seniors Education Committee requested a series of 7 or 8 week classes.

The Project was able to respond to all community requests for workshops. However there was a time in the life of the project when we thought that we might not be able to. The Older Women's Network is recommending that a further older women's network project be initiated in which a primary component would be training teams of educator/facilitators who could expand the education workshops and thus the networking in a variety of communities and districts. More will be said about this in the section on outcomes and recommendations.

Prairie Cronies Summer Gathering

The first regional gathering of the network took place July 14 and 15, 1992, in a two day cronies' gathering which focused on nurturing older women and the emerging older women's network by:

* Celebrating the gifts of older women.

* Exploring the issues that older women face.

* Strengthening self esteem and hope amongst older women.

* Sharing information and learning resources.

Day One of the Prairie Cronies Summer Gathering focused on celebrating the gifts of the crones. Participants were encouraged to bring their art to share with others. These were displays and demonstrations of Visual and Folk Arts, Handwork and Home Arts, (such as jam and jelly making, flower arranging, etc.), Creative Writing as well as Making Music and Singing.

The first day of the gathering ended with an evening celebration and special performance by Saskatchewan singer and songwriter Connie Kaldor.

Day Two focused on coping and working for change. This day focused on five specific issues that face older women, namely:

* Being a primary care giver

* Health after 55

* Older women on a limited income

* Transportation and isolation

* Friends and support groups.

In participatory workshops the participants considered resources, gaps in resources and recommendations related to each of these concerns.

The vast majority of participants (82 in all) were older women from a variety of communities in southern Saskatchewan. Agency and professionally- related people were the minority of participants.

The gathering made specific recommendations with regard to the agenda for improving quality of life and independence for older women in this province. One recommendation clearly named was the need for ongoing networking of older women through relevant, accessible education opportunities. Other recommendations were in the areas of housing, income, transportation, health and social attitudes toward older women.

The planning process for that gathering helped to strengthen the network of older women in this province. The central planning team consisted of women from the Project Working Group and other volunteers. This group met on five occasions between March and July to work on the basic direction-setting and decision-making for the gathering. The planning team offered suggestions or suggested women who could provide leadership for particular pieces of the two-day event. The coordinator's role was to serve as staff to the central planning team, tend to promotion and logistics and to recruit and orient those who provided leadership at the gathering.

Six women served on the central planning team. A host of other women provided leadership for specific program areas. As one woman said, "older women have so much to offer and so much to learn from one another: it's good to have the chance to be together to share significantly and feel proud of ourselves and each other."

Older Women Living in Hope

This two-day workshop and alternative "winter holiday" took place at Prairie Christian Training Centre, Fort Qu'Appelle,February 1-3, 1993. It was the second regional gathering of the network.

The purpose of the workshop was to gather older women for a time of:

* cultivating hope in the midst of exploring the issues that older women face in their individual and community lives.

* creating bonds that can continue to give support back home following the workshop.

* Strengthening community networks that contribute to the well being of older women.

This workshop was led by Dr. Beth Glick-Reiman, who is herself a seventy-year-old woman, besides being a freelance consultant, writer, speaker and leader of groups. The workshop was highly evaluated by participants and again women said they want ongoing opportunities to gather for times of significant learning and sharing with one another.

The process of recruiting and inviting participants focused on women who are vulnerable and susceptible to isolation, which includes nearly all older women at one time or another.

For both the Prairie Cronies Summer Gathering and Older Women Living in Hope the Project Working Groups decided to keep the registration fees low and to provide bursaries for participants on a limited income and bursaries to help cover the cost of respite care or child care. As we worked with women we became aware of how many are living on low incomes and who are primary care givers or primary child care givers.

Life Cycle Learning Publications

In the second quarter of the project a decision was made by the Project Working Group to publish a series of monograms called Life Cycle Learning publications. These publications were to be in place of a network newsletter which was envisioned in the original project proposal. We heard a consistent message from seniors and their agencies and organizations throughout the province that there were sufficient vehicles for sharing information and that another newsletter would not be helpful.

A decision was made to do project promotion and information sharing via existing seniors' related media such as the Seniors' Mechanism mailings, the provincial seniors' newspaper called The Saskatchewan Senior and through weekly newspapers.

The Life Cycle Learning publications were planned and designed to provide a print resource related to specific needs that older women face. A series of four publications were produced during the project with the following themes:

Widowhood: An End and a New Beginning

Older Women and Poverty

Giving and Taking Care, a resource for Primary Care Givers

This Will Fix You Up: Older Women and the Wise Use of Medication.

The publications are intended to be useful to older women many of whom face these issues. The publications use a consistent format, beginning with the story/stories from women of the network related to widowhood, poverty, caregiving or the wise use of medication. Subsequent sections of each publication deal with basic concerns and necessary changes, as well as print, audio visual and community resources related to each of the focus areas.

Life Cycle Learning Publications have been distributed to the network to be used by individuals and/or as a resource in educational workshops.

These publications can also be ordered from the Seniors' Education Centre at a cost of $4.00 per set.

Developing Audio Visual Resources

Creating Prairie Cronies enjoyed collaborating with others in the production of two videos and National CBC Radio Interview.

Older Women and Poverty was the theme of a video that Creating Prairie Cronies co-produced with Spirit Connection. Spirit Connection is a national United Church of Canada news magazine sponsored by the United Church of Canada which focuses on contemporary Canadian and international social issues. In this ten-minute production, six older Saskatchewan women from a variety of backgrounds, including a Metis woman and a woman originally from the Philippines, talk about their experiences with poverty. These women are eloquent on the root causes of poverty in women's lives and what can be done to turn things around. This video is available upon request on a loan basis from the Seniors' Education Centre.

Living Our Lives is about the celebrations and challenges of growing older as a woman in this society. The idea for this video grew out of the Older Woman's Network. A sister committee of older women worked with SEC project staff person Diane Mullan to produce this video.

Rural and urban women, aboriginal and immigrant women speak from their hearts about the issues affecting them and their communities. They share their insights about the prominent concerns of older women, particularly financial insecurity, the role of caregiving and isolation.

This 30 minute video is accompanied by an educational workshop design and thus is a valuable resource for the network of older women. It is available for purchase or on a loan basis from the

Seniors' Education Centre.

The National CBC Radio program Open House worked together with two women from the network and the project coordinator to produce a 15 minute interview on "Being a Crone". This interview was aired in May 92.

Outcomes and Recommendations

Funding for Creating Prairie Cronies, the Older Women's Network, has come to a close; however, the network is very much alive. During the project's final three quarters (September '92-March '93) the Project Working Group met with a variety of women from the network for the purpose of evaluating, integrating learnings and planning for the future of the network.

The following verbatim comments speak for themselves in terms of outcomes.

"We feel good about many of the things that we have done such as the public relations and media campaigns, the video on older women and poverty, the workshops in various communities and on a number of different topics, the Life Cycle Learning Publications, the Prairie Cronie Summer Gathering and Older Women Living in Hope."

"A crone is a friend, a crone used to be an honourable place and it still should be. We're trying to encourage people to think of cronies as special friends, women who are in the third phase of life, after the change, when you come into your own power."

"Trying to reach out to lonely and isolated women is difficult. Some women are afraid that confidentiality will not be respected and so they are hesitant to talk and share. In Prairie Cronies we have tried to be very clear about modelling and cultivating a norm of confidentiality in all workshops and gatherings."

"In this network women found out that they are not alone in whatever their hardships might be."

"I didn't realize there was so much creativity among older women."

"This grandmother is off her rocker and intends to stay that way."

"The decisions about this project belonged to us. The circle formation with Project Working Group members and the project coordinator gave people the chance to belong."

"Group ideas were even better than what any of us could have come up with alone."
"Decisions were based on the needs and visions of Crones."

"At the first PWG meeting we set guiding principles to hold ourselves accountable to. These guides helped us with our

way of working and helped us in the work in communities." (See section on Project Working Group.)

"There is an abundance of resources available among us when we gather, i.e.: planning skills, writing skills, artistic skills, life experience, ideas, leadership."

"Being part of this group has helped me to have the courage to reach out once again."

As a result of the very positive experience of Creating Prairie Cronies, the Older Women's Network, the following formal recommendations are being put to Health and Welfare Canada, Senior's Independence Program:

1. Continuing to build, develop and nurture the older women' network and the work that has begun during the project Creating Prairie Cronies. A group of volunteers from the network are developing and will be submitting a proposal to New Horizons for the purposes of stabilizing and expanding the network of older women. The focus of the network will continue to be on isolated and vulnerable older women who live in rural areas.

2. Extending appreciation to Health and Welfare Canada, Health Promotions Directorate for funding the network for a two year period (1991-1993). Two-year funding granted at the outset of the project enabled the Project Working Group and coordinator to do some longer term planning and building of the network. Short term funding is not nearly as useful or in the end, as cost efficient, because much time must be spent with fund raising and administration rather than project planning, implementation and evaluation. The PWG also appreciated the skill and helpful project supervision offered by Health and Welfare Field Representatives, Cate Harrington and latterly Larry Flynn.

3. Encouraging the development and funding of gender specific applied research and health promotions project for older adults.

The needs and issues that face older women and those that face older men are very different. Recreation and/or social programs can be done effectively in mixed gender groups. However, in the experience of Creating Prairie Cronies, health promotion and/or education and networking programs were strengthened significantly by virtue of this program being gender-specific. Some of the common experiences of older women, including being a primary care-giver, living in poverty, being a widow, and depending on medication are experienced in different ways and with different frequency by women and men.

4. Encouraging and using sound adult education community development and feminist principles in all aspects of programming. These included consultation, empowerment, shared decision making, programming which is rooted in the needs identified by the constituent group, and on-going evaluation of all aspects of the programming. These principles, which Prairie Cronies tried to incorporate in all aspects of the project, laid the foundations for building confidence and self-esteem, and helping women make meaningful connections with one another, and eventually to have a vision of and commitment to networking with one another. Process which is respectful of individual and community resources, limitations and needs results in high quality and meaningful programs and products.

5. Taking social/cultural contexts into consideration in program planning and implementation. In the older women's network it continues to be critical to recognize and work to change the ageism and sexism that affect older women on a daily basis.

6. Requesting funding from the Seniors' Independence Program for a Cross Cultural Intergenerational Pilot Project for the Touchwood, File Hills, Qu'Appelle, Carry the Kettle Reserves and adjacent towns and districts.

In the final phases of Creating Prairie Cronies one of the needs that non-aboriginal women from the network clearly identified was their need and interest to get to know and work with First Nations women.

Three gatherings of First Nations and white women have taken place:

March 16 & 17, 1993 at PCTC with 18 participants
April 27, 1993 at PCTC with 11 participants
June 7 & 8, 1993 at PCTC with 10 participants

The purpose of these gatherings have been:

- to make connections with one another,

- to talk about aging and how it is different in some ways and similar in other ways for First Nations and white women and

- to explore ideas for what older women can do to bring down the barriers of misunderstanding and build bridges of respect and friendship.

A Cross Cultural Intergenerational Project Proposal has been developed by this group and Seniors' Education Centre staff and will soon be submitted to the Seniors' Independence Program, Health and Welfare Canada, for funding.

There is substantial and exciting community support on and off reserves in the identified geographical area for this project.

A Cree woman elder, speaking at the gathering, said, "We would be wise to take the time and trouble now to help our children be friends with one another and not be prejudiced. Otherwise there will be even more hatred and suffering in the future."

Closing Comments

Working with the older women in Saskatchewan has been a privilege and a wonderful learning experience for me as the coordinator of this project. There is much to learn from and with older women who have had rich and varied "lived experience." Older women as well as society as a whole can benefit from reclaiming the place of "the crone." The always extraordinary material of "older women's" everyday experience continues to enlighten and heal.

Special appreciation goes to the staff and volunteer colleagues at the Seniors' Education Centre, University Extension, University of Regina and the Seniors' University Group. These people offer consistent support, challenge to the Seniors' Education Centre vision of enabling and empowering older adults in life long learning.

As ninety-year-old Alice Perry says, "the older women's movement is in its infancy, we are full of life and potential, gaining ground and gaining speed."

Footnotes

1. Mary Meigs, In the Company of Strangers. Vancouver: Talon Books, 1991.

2. Gee, E. and Kimball, M., Women and Aging. Toronto: Butterworth, 1987.

3. Ibid.

4. National Council of Welfare, Women and Poverty Revisited. Ottawa, 1990.

5. Leah Cohen, Small Expectations: Society's Betrayal of Older Women. MeClelland and Stewart, 1984, p.7.

6. Evelyn Rosenthal, editor Women, Aging and Ageism. New York: Harrington Paul Press, 1990.